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· REPORT ·

Action Plan Release



Shown above are Allan Douglas (top) and Jim Vargo (bottom), Task Team Chairmen, receiving commemorative covers of the Action Plan from the Honourable Jim Dinning.



· MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR ·

By Gary McPherson
CHAIRPERSON

This article is a collection of my thoughts interwoven with those of others and is intended to provoke discussion which will assist in the quest for equality.

The entire system as it relates to disability is inadvertently designed to either allow or keep the person with a disability dependent upon the system throughout his or her life. By this I mean that the moment a person comes through the hospital door with either a long term debilitating illness or injury, that individual is able to "cop out" of societal responsibilities. There is little if any expectation of the individual to move beyond the stage of physical rehabilitation. There is an expectation that society will in some way need to care for

that individual for the rest of his or her life.

This opinion is corroborated by an article, A new definition of disability: Implications for rehabilitation practice and social policy, Canadian Journal of Occupational Therapy, February 1990, written by two rehabilitation professionals, Lyn Jongbloed and Anne Crichton. The article indicates that rehabilitation practitioners have been too focused on assisting the individual to regain his or her physical mobility and that once this has been accomplished to the extent possible and the client leaves the rehabilitation environment, rehabilitation stops. The point of the article is that rehabilitation practitioners should be getting involved in social issues, assisting in breaking down barriers, so their clients can actually become fully functioning members of society. Individuals, rather

Status

Status Report is published by the Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities and is intended to provoke discussion about issues facing persons with disabilities. If you have any comments or would like to receive Status Report please contact us at:

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· MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR ·

"The entire system as it relates to disability is inadvertently designed to ...keep the person with a disability dependent..."

"Attitudes towards people with disabilities need to change."

than being discouraged and unwilling to face the real world after the debilitating illness or injury, should be able to re-enter society with optimism, knowing that if they want to obtain employment or continue their education, or simply move about their environment unhindered, they can do so. Physical and attitudinal barriers should not prevent the person from being a fully contributing member of society.

In another article, Do no harm: Policy options that meet human needs, Social Policy, Summer 1989, John McKnight of Northwestern University poses the view that professionals make a big mistake by focusing on the deficits that are brought about by illness or injury rather than focusing on strengths that remain after the onset of a traumatic or chronic condition. McKnight says that we are over-served by the human services professions, that each service on its own may have value but when you combine one service with several others, there is a cumulative effect that is often negative despite involving huge fiscal resources. The end result may be to make the individual, whom the services are intended to help, reliant upon of a false environment created by the constant attention and other residual effects of human service professions (e.g. poor sense of self worth, decreased participation in the community).

Imagine what could happen if the energy expended by those people involved in the various professions, combined with the fiscal resources that go to support them and their programs, were focused in an alternate way to assist individuals with disabilities to optimize their strengths, and to break down societal barriers, both physical and attitudinal. In essence, what McKnight is saying is that we need to focus on people's remaining abilities and work with them to optimize their strengths. In order for this to happen, what has to change?

Attitudes towards people with disabilities need to change. This is true not only of the general public and politicians, but also of professionals in the human services field. These professionals must no longer think of their patients or clients as people that are dependent on them for service, but rather as partners who should be treated as equals and assisted to regain their feet, so to speak. This requires a significant shift in attitudes, policies and programs, and a reshaping of the system. In other words, the minute someone goes through the hospital door, there needs to be an expectation that the individual will once again become a contributing member of society, and that the trip to the hospital and subsequent rehabilitation is merely an interruption and catalyst for return to a normal fulfilling life.



The Challenge of Implementation

COUNCIL UPDATE

By Eric Boyd
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

The release of the Premier's Council Action Plan raises the question of where do we go from here. Will the Action Plan form the basis for meaningful change which will dramatically improve the status of persons with disabilities, or will it simply become another report destined to gather dust on some back shelf? If the former is to happen, what strategies will need to be employed from this point on?

First of all, the Council is very aware that the Action Plan has been delivered to our government in an environment of fiscal restraint, **and the likelihood of large sums of new dollars being allocated to its implementation is highly unlikely.** Therefore, it will be necessary to convince government to reassess current priorities and reallocate existing resources. It is clear that such a decision will have to be made at the Cabinet level. In the coming weeks, a major priority for our Council will be to communicate this message to Premier Getty and individual Cabinet Ministers, and to seek a Cabinet commitment to implementation of the Action Plan in principle. In light of Cabinet's endorsement of the Vision Paper, we are optimistic that such support will be forthcoming.

Successful implementation will also require strong support from disabled Albertans, and their representative organizations. The development of the Action Plan, we believe, was in keeping with our prin-

ciple of "consumers as consultants". The recommendations strive to address solutions to the many concerns we heard as we travelled throughout the Province. It will be important that all stakeholders see the document as a blueprint for change, and support it in that context. There will be adequate opportunity to fine tune the detailed recommendations during the implementation process. We will strive to meet with organizations over the coming months to clarify any concerns regarding specific recommendations. We would urge boards and management to review the document and communicate their support to MLAs and the Premier.

In the meantime, we are encouraged by the positive response and cooperation we have received from individual government departments to date. Many initiatives are already underway with the Ministries of Health, Social Services, Transportation, Parks and Recreation, Culture, Career Development and Employment, and Labour. I will review and report on the progress of these initiatives in the next issue of Status Report.

Unlike many reports which tend to get produced with the best of intentions, I believe the Action Plan's potential for successful implementation is greatly improved by the ongoing presence of the Premier's Council, and we see its implementation as a key component of our remaining mandate. Clearly, our greatest challenge lies ahead!

"...we are encouraged by the positive response and cooperation from individual departments..."



Action Plan Summary

· ACTION PLAN ·

The Premier's Council Action Plan addresses government policy in nine major areas that have an impact on the status of persons with disabilities. It has been prepared following extensive consultation with consumers, professionals, advocates, and government officials. The recommendations attempt to ensure that policies are consistent with the principles of the Council articulated in "Towards a New Vision of Abilities in Alberta".

of a leadership role by government in supporting and promoting employment for persons with disabilities.

Education

Fragmented and uncoordinated services, funding issues, and inadequate teacher preparation and support are among the problems in the area of education. As well, integration/segregation and parental choice regarding placement remain unresolved. Recommendations emphasize integration as the first option, and therefore focus on increased accessibility of schools, improvements in the assessment and appeals processes and support for teachers. Provincial standards for special education programs and student evaluation are recommended, as are better methods of accountability for special education funds.

Recreation

The key issues are integration/segregation and accessibility of facilities and events in the areas of culture, recreation and sports. Alberta Recreation and Parks is directed to develop minimum standards for barrier free design and access to publicly funded parks and recreation facilities. Similarly, Alberta Culture and Multiculturalism is directed to develop standards that include the needs of people with sensory disabilities for access to cultural events.

Transportation

A provincial policy on barrier free mobility, including the development of barrier free standards for transportation and pedestrian environments, will pave the way for the province to promote accessibility within municipalities. Alberta Transportation and Utilities is directed to examine several options to meet the transportation

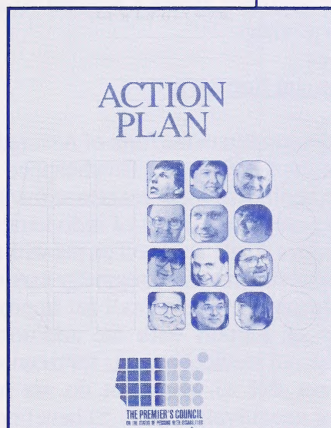
Training

This includes both vocational and non-vocational training with an emphasis on training for employment to allow persons with disabilities to participate equitably in the job market. The recommendations focus on reorganizing and restructuring vocational services within Alberta Career Development and Employment to maximize the impact of the Vocational Rehabilitation of Disabled Persons (VRDP) Act and directing the transfer of responsibility

for vocational services to persons with mental disabilities from Alberta Family and Social Services to Alberta Career Development and Employment.

Employment

In order to improve labour force participation and reduce unemployment, it is recommended that policies be developed and implemented on provincial employment equity and provision of supports needed to access and maintain employment. Other recommendations focus on improved opportunities for advancement, research and development in the use of technical aids for employment, and demonstration





ACTION PLAN

needs of Albertans, including accessible public transportation, adapted private vehicles and parallel transit systems.

Housing

Shelter issues include the range of options available (e.g., apartments, co-operatives, group homes, room and board), location of appropriate housing, and access to amenities and services or programs. Recommendations focus on improved accessibility, changes in rent subsidies, and increased availability of transitional housing.

Accessibility

Since the Alberta Building Code is open for revision in 1990, there is a heavy emphasis on supporting the recommendations of the Barrier Free Design Committee, improving the status of this committee, and recognizing the efforts of designers and developers with a Premier's Barrier Free Design Award. Alberta Labour is directed to improve enforcement of barrier free design requirements through education and certification of inspectors, and through public and professional education. Tax credits are proposed for businesses that provide access to persons with disabilities.

Personal Supports

These are defined as technical aids (e.g., wheelchairs, braille readers, hearing aids) and human services (e.g., personal care attendant, job coach, homemaker) to assist individuals at home and in the community. However, there is currently a multitude of programs with differing eligibility criteria creating confusion, frustration and gaps in service.

The Action Plan calls for consolidation of existing programs from Alberta Health, Alberta Family and Social Services, and Alberta Career Development and Employment into a single unit that would serve individuals regardless of age or the purpose for which assistance is required. A ministerial task force is recommended to provide direction in design and implementation of the unit. In the interim, recommendations call for improvements to existing programs, particularly expansion of Coordinated Home Care and Aids to Daily Living.

Financial Supports

Income support in the form of Assured Income for the Severely Handicapped has fallen behind in recent years to so that it no longer meets the needs of individuals or provides a level of support on par with that provided to seniors, as originally intended. The recommendations call for improved levels of support with the addition of transitional medical benefits for those who become able to work, but do not have access to equivalent medical benefits.

Collaboration between Alberta Family and Social Services and Alberta Career Development and Employment is recommended to ensure that individuals have access to training when appropriate. In the past AISH recipients have been denied access to some training programs.

Alberta Information Network

Easy access to current information about programs, services and funding has been identified as an issue for people with disabilities for over a decade. The Action Plan therefore recommends the development of an Alberta Information Network to meet this need.

"...recommendations attempt to ensure that policies are consistent with the principles of the Council..."

Copies of the Action Plan can be obtained by contacting the Premier's Council office at either 422-1095 or 1-800-272-8841



Free Ride Costs Too Much

· ATTITUDES ·

By Zach Shore (Reprinted with permission from The Braille Monitor)

This article was written from the perspective of someone who is blind and originally appeared in The Braille Monitor. The ideas in the article, however, pertain to persons with all types of disabilities.

I am a blind citizen, and although I once utilized half-fares for public transportation, I would never accept any blind discounts today. In most major cities, blind citizens are permitted to pay half price or discount rates on all forms of public transportation. I am opposed to such demeaning and unnecessary treatment.

For many years I carried my public transit half fare card with me whenever I traveled in Philadelphia and presented it faithfully with my money, generally saving about sixty cents a trip. I believed that, since I could not drive, it was only reasonable that I should not be penalized for this handicap. Since sighted people had the option of driving and I didn't, I reasoned that I was entitled to compensation. "Besides," I used to tell myself, "times are tough. I'm not exactly Donald Trump, and I can't afford not to take advantage of every chance to save money." Only much later did I consider that many sighted people cannot drive for numerous reasons and they take public transportation as frequently as I do. I began to reassess my basic assumptions about what I could and could not afford.

Sigmund Freud noted that there are two desires common to most humans: the desire to be loved and accepted by others, and the yearning to make one's own way in life financially. Certainly this is as true of the blind as it is of any other group. I recognize that this charitable offer of blind discounts is made with only the sincerest and most well-meaning intentions possible, but nevertheless, their effect is extremely detrimental to the blind. Rather than giving us a helping hand, they pre-

vent us from fulfilling the basic human desire for financial independence by encouraging blind people to remain dependent on public handouts.

Half or discount fares serve to reinforce the prevailing social myths that the blind are the objects of charity and pity, who exist as social parasites depleting the tax dollars of hard-working citizens. Every time blind people use a half-fare or blind discount, they perpetuate the image of the blind as beggars. The bus driver who is presented with a half-fare card will invariably associate blindness with inequality and inability. How can he think anything else? It is simply not worth the cost.

The price we pay in public attitudes far outweighs whatever we might save in the immediate cost of transportation. There is a direct link between blind discounts and our economic and social status. It is no accident that 70% of our nation's working-age blind are unemployed. The majority of the nation's employers view the blind as helpless, dependent charity-seekers, rather than competent, motivated members of the work force and potential employees.

Part of being American citizens is sharing in both rights and responsibilities. We can never hope to gain equal status in society if we are not willing to take on our financial obligations, and that means paying our fair share along with everybody else. As long as we shirk our responsibilities, the blind will remain second-class citizens with all the misery which that entails. There are still no free lunches or free rides - not even for the blind. We pay a price for everything we do in life. For the blind as a minority, the price for half-fares is simply too high.

"We can never hope to gain equal status in society if we are not willing to take on our financial obligations..."



Rent Supplement Program

HOUSING

By Dale Jacobs
INFORMATION OFFICER

In the province of Alberta there exists a program called Rent Supplement which could, if used to its full potential, alleviate many of the housing problems currently facing people with disabilities. The stated purpose of the Rent Supplement Program is to provide "affordable rental accommodation in designated projects for people in need of housing" (AMHC Fact Sheet). Funding for this program is cost-shared by the Canada Mortgage and Housing Corporation (70%) and the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation (30%).

Applicants to the program must be Canadian Citizens, independent landed immigrants or government-sponsored refugees and have lived in Alberta for at least six months. The maximum allowable household income in order to qualify varies with the number of bedrooms required and the area of the province. For example, to be eligible for Rent Supplement on a one bedroom unit in the Edmonton area, the highest allowable household income is \$18,000/year. The same situation in the Calgary area yields an allowable household income of \$19,500/year, because of the higher cost of rental accommodation. In addition, total household assets must not exceed \$7000, excluding a car and furniture, unless the applicant is over 55, in which case the requirement is waived. Rent paid by successful applicants under the program is equal to 25 per cent of monthly household income.

Under this program, housing is provided in designated rental accommodations owned or managed by landlords who have entered into an agreement with the Alberta Mortgage and Housing Corporation. Two cheques are thus received by the landlord: one from the tenant in the amount of 25%

of household income and one from AMHC to cover the difference between the amount paid by the tenant and the negotiated market rent. Periodic review of the local housing market ensures that the landlord receives fair market value for the suite.

The biggest single problem with the program is that it is very difficult to find landlords who are willing to do all of the paperwork required to enter into an agreement with AMHC in order to receive rent from two separate sources. Also, application processing time may mean that a landlord will have to forego rent for a period of time. All of these factors act as deterrents to landlords becoming involved in the program, especially in a tight housing market. Vacancy rates for apartments in Calgary and Edmonton are currently 1.1% and 1.9% respectively (Housing Market Trends, February, 1990). The climate is certainly not ripe for a huge influx of landlords into the program.

How then can this program be better utilized to meet the needs of people with disabilities? One possible solution to the problem is to have the supplement follow the renter, without being tied to a specific unit. This would allow a person with a disability to find accessible accommodation in the desired location based on 25% of household income. Whether this is a viable solution remains to be seen, but at the very least it must be reviewed to determine feasibility. If the current system of designated units is to be continued, the process for landlords must be both simplified and shortened. The easier it is for them, the more likely they are to agree to have suites involved in the Rent Supplement Program. Constant review and fine tuning can make the Rent Supplement Program responsive to the housing requirements of those in the greatest need.





Premier's Council Position on Transportation

TRANSPORTATION

By Dale Jacobs
INFORMATION OFFICER

"The province...acts largely as a funding source for municipalities through municipal transportation grants."

In order to be involved in any of the aspects of daily life, such as work, school, or recreation, it is necessary to be able to get to the site of the activity. It is, therefore, of paramount importance that mobility be seen as a human right for persons with disabilities. Mobility "includes both conveyance in a vehicle and movement on foot or by alternate means from one place to another along a route available to members of the public" (Action Plan, 36). In other words, any travel from point A to point B is included in the concept of mobility.

To ensure that mobility as a human right is guaranteed for persons with disabilities, a combination of public transportation, adapted private vehicles, subsidized taxis, and parallel systems must be supported. The first choice must be the public transportation system, as it is able to accommodate the greatest number of people in the least expensive and most flexible manner. It must, however, be recognized that the public system is not the answer to the transportation needs of all persons with disabilities. For example, if a person using a wheelchair cannot access a bus stop because of the weather, a fully lift-equipped bus is of no real value to that person. Factors such as climate mean that some individuals may be better served by one or a combination of the above mentioned options. However, these options will only be supported in situations "where individuals cannot be reasonably accommodated within the regular system be-

cause of the complexity of their needs" (Action Plan, 34). For the majority of people public systems can be adapted to ensure accessibility to people with all types of disabilities. The combination of approaches earlier described will provide transportation to all persons with disabilities.



In order to ensure that mobility is acknowledged as a human right, the Premier's Council has recommended that the Department of Transportation and Utilities develop a barrier free transportation and mobility policy. Such a policy will define the concept of mobility and support barrier free stan-

dards in public transportation, parallel systems, and pedestrian environments to ensure that concrete steps are taken in ensuring mobility for persons with disabilities. In addition, such a policy will acknowledge that a combination of solutions, including both public and parallel systems, as well as private vehicles, must be used to provide the level of transportation and mobility needed by persons with disabilities. Development of the policy is to be guided by a senior staff person in Alberta Transportation and Utilities, in consultation with an advisory committee comprised of stakeholders, which will also function in an ongoing evaluation and monitoring role. It is important that the Department establish a policy immediately to guide future legislative and funding efforts in the area of mobility.

The province is not directly involved in provision of transportation services, but acts largely as a funding source for mu-



"It is ... of paramount importance that mobility be seen as a human right for persons with disabilities"

· TRANSPORTATION ·

nicipalities through municipal transportation grants. On a practical level this presents a problem for a department attempting to implement a barrier free transportation policy: funding comes from the provincial government, but policy decisions rest with the municipal governments. Alberta Transportation and Utilities must therefore ensure that provincial barrier free standards are an essential component of the provincial/municipal funding agreements and encourage municipalities to incorporate these standards into municipal by-laws. This is an extremely important point because it is only through standards that the provincial government can influence municipal spending practices in the

area of transportation.

To help facilitate implementation of the mobility policy, specific funding mechanisms must be developed in a number of areas. Among these areas are the upgrading of public transportation and pedestrian environments, subsidization of private vehicle adaptation, funding of equitable parallel systems, incentives to taxi companies to adapt cabs, and funding to upgrade intercity transportation. All of these areas must be addressed for a barrier free mobility policy to be successful. Standards and funding will make mobility a true human right in the province of Alberta.

· NEWS SHORTS ·

A studio-based current affairs and information program, called the **Disability Network**, which is produced and hosted by persons with disabilities, began broadcasting in January 1990. Co-produced by CBC Toronto and the Centre for Independent Living in Toronto, the show will serve as an entertaining and accessible source of information on issues relating to persons with disabilities. The Disability Network can be seen on CBC Newsworld.

The Americans with Disabilities Act has now passed the Senate and is pending in the House of Representatives. This legislation would effectively prohibit discrimination on the basis of disability in all areas. It is expected to become law by the end of 1990.

Effective March 1, 1990, **Famous Players Theatres** discontinued its practice of offering reduced or free admission to customers with disabilities. The change in policy is the result of discussions with government organizations, advocacy groups, and customers and has been instituted to ensure equitable treatment of all customers.

Amendments to the **Individual's Rights Protection Act** were introduced in the Alberta Legislature on March 13, 1990. The change means that protection against discrimination on the basis of mental disability will now be included in the Act. The amendment received Royal Assent on May 14, 1990.



· APPOINTMENTS TO COUNCIL ·

We are pleased to announce the addition of four new members to the Premier's Council, appointed by Order in Council on March 29, 1990. Kaye Brock, Martin Goldstein, Ray Hegerat, and Everett Soop have accepted three year terms of appointment.

Kaye Brock

Brain injury has been the main concern of Ms. Brock through much of her volunteer life. In 1981 she was instrumental in the founding of the Association for the Rehabilitation of the Brain Injured, serving as both President and Service Volunteer. 1984 saw her aid in the establishment of the Head Injured Relearning Society, of which she is now President. The Head Injury Association of Alberta was formed in 1987 with Ms. Brock a founding member. In addition, Ms. Brock also volunteers with various other community organizations.

Ray Hegerat

Being learning disabled himself, Mr. Hegerat has experienced firsthand the frustrations of the education system at both the secondary and post-secondary levels. Upon identification and assistance from the Learning Disabled Programme at the University of Alberta, he graduated with Distinction from the Faculty of Education. Currently, Mr. Hegerat teaches students with multiple handicaps at W.P. Wagner High School in Edmonton and serves on the Committee for Disabled Students Policy at the University of Alberta.

Martin Goldstein

Having received his Bachelor of Arts from Sir George Williams University and his Master of Arts in Counselling of the Deaf from Gallaudet University, Mr. Goldstein entered the Teacher Training of the Deaf Program at the University of Alberta in 1981. Since completion of this program in 1981 he has worked as Teacher of the Hearing Impaired at the Queen Elizabeth High School in Calgary. Prior to this Mr. Goldstein served as Dean of Residence at the Alberta School for the Deaf in Edmonton from 1975 to 1981. Mr. Goldstein is himself hearing impaired.

Everett Soop

Extensive involvement with issues related both to native people and to persons with disabilities have been a large part of Mr. Soop's life. Volunteer positions that he has held in various organizations include Board Member of the Alberta Indian Health Care Commission, Member of the Alberta Advisory Board for Recreation for the Disabled, and President of the Southern Alberta Native Handicap Society. In addition, Mr. Soop has acted as a resource person for various organizations and departments, including the Alberta Committee of Disabled Citizens, Coalition of Provincial Organizations of the Handicapped, and Indian and Northern Affairs. Mr. Soop has Muscular Dystrophy and is hearing impaired.



· UPCOMING EVENTS ·

Citizenship/Expectations Spring Conference Red Deer May 29-30, 1990 For more information phone (403) 340-5630. Sponsored by the Michener Centre.

Let's Get on with it: Accountability for Children's Mental Health Workshop Edmonton May 31, 1990 For more information contact Judy Ballantyne at (403) 482-6091. Sponsored by the Canadian Mental Health Association.

Western Canada Conference on Supported Employment Winnipeg May 30-June 2, 1990 For more information call (204) 949-1464.

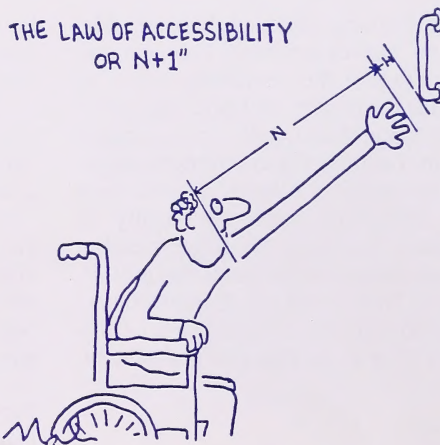
Suicide Research Symposium Calgary June 5, 1990 For more information contact Dr. B. Tanney at (403) 268-9210.

Breakfast of Champions, National Access Awareness Week Kickoff Hilton Hotel, Edmonton June 11, 1990 For more information contact Jodi Gagnon at (403) 423-4106.

Is your association or agency sponsoring a provincial or national conference or workshop? If so, please forward the pertinent information to:

Premier's Council on the Status of Persons with Disabilities
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· THE LAST WORD ·



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